

**Neighborhood Ten Study
Committee Meeting #5
February 24, 2005
Land Use and Zoning (cont.), Housing**

Committee members present: Rebekah Kaufman, Henry Lukas, Joan Marszalek, Robert Putnam, Chip Strang, Rachel Cobb, Primo Vannicelli, John Moukad, Joshua Rowland, Bill Forster

Staff present: Elaine Thorne, Taha Jennings, Les Barber, Roger Boothe, Chris Cotter, Cassie Arnaud

Welcome and introductions:

The meeting began with a brief recap of the previous presentation and discussion regarding zoning, land use, and urban design in Neighborhood Ten. It was explained that the discussion would continue for the first portion of the meeting, with the Committee exploring the issues introduced at the last meeting in further detail, and possibly beginning to make some zoning, land use, and urban design recommendations for Neighborhood Ten. Further, draft recommendations would be subject to modifications as the committee gets more information on other relevant topics throughout the study process. For the second portion of the meeting, Chris Cotter, the Director of the Housing Division of the Community Development Department, and Cassie Arnaud, a project planner with the Housing Division, gave a presentation on affordable housing in Cambridge.

Committee discussion:

In order to facilitate the zoning, land use, and urban design discussion, several discussion questions based on comments from the previous meeting (1/27) were distributed to the committee. Study Committee members used the questions as guidelines during the discussion. The Study Committee's comments focused on zoning, land use, and urban design issues especially in several key locations in the neighborhood including: the Mount Auburn Hospital site, Star Market site, commercial areas along Fresh Pond Parkway, and Huron Village

General Zoning

There was a desire expressed for information on the buildout potential and development pressures in Neighborhood Ten 20 to 30 years into the future and how it will affect the character of the neighborhood. Of particular concern are traffic patterns, urban design, and the public review process. There was general satisfaction with the current character of the residential districts throughout Neighborhood Ten. Some committee members asked about specific regulatory tools used in the City including public review for smaller developments (under 50,000 sq ft.), zoning changes, creation of historic districts, and exercising eminent domain. There were also questions on the possibility of residential conversions to commercial uses (especially along Brattle Street), creation of housing above retail, and the potential for new commercial development.

Mount Auburn Hospital

There was overall Committee concern with the types of uses possible at the Mount Auburn Hospital site as well as how much new development could be created at the site over a long term period (20 to 30 years) under current zoning. Committee members felt that it is important to address traffic issues associated with new development at the site. There should also be a long-term public review and consultation process to address neighborhood concerns as the site is redeveloped in the future.

Fresh Pond Parkway

Several committee members asked if the commercial strip along Fresh Pond Parkway could be transformed into a neighborhood destination or village area, similar to Huron Village. It was noted that currently there is nothing to draw neighborhood residents to the area. Some committee members stated that they would support increased density in the area to enhance the urban design and create better development. There was a desire for more pedestrian amenities in order to create better connections to the rest of the neighborhood and make the area more user friendly. A committee member pointed out that it is important to balance pedestrian amenities with the realities of vehicular needs in the area. Someone also noted that public transportation should be a critical part of improvements to the area.

Star Market

Several committee members felt that the Star Market site might be appropriate for redevelopment. Someone stated that there should be community involvement and a review process before any proposal is submitted or any permit is issued. There were some questions regarding how much public review would be required, if the site were to be redeveloped, and if it is adequate. It was noted that a mixed-use development at the site might be a possibility but it is important to protect the quality of the neighborhood.

Marsh District, Huron Village, Concord Avenue

There was consensus among the Study Committee that the portion of the Marsh Conservation District currently zoned Residence C2 along Mount Auburn Street should be re-zoned in order to more accurately reflect the type and character of development that is currently there (relatively small wood framed houses).

The Study Committee expressed some concern with the recent loss of the Drug Store and Post Office in Huron Village and the corresponding loss of some of the qualities that make the area a neighborhood focus. There was a general feeling that the qualities of the area should be protected. Someone asked if it is possible to protect the neighborhood focus of Huron Village through zoning. Another committee member noted that the fact that only a few owners control the commercial property in Huron Village helps to maintain the current look and quality of the area.

Several committee members stated that they were not necessarily opposed to commercial development along Concord Avenue. Someone asked if it is possible to change zoning for only certain parcels. There was also a question regarding the economic possibilities for commercial activity on Concord Avenue. Another committee member suggested looking at the type of commercial activity currently on Concord Avenue and encouraging pedestrian based commercial development.

Housing Discussion:

Cassie Arnaud, a Project Planner in the Community Development Department's Housing Division, gave a brief overview of affordable housing programs in Cambridge. The presentation included information on:

- Income guidelines for affordable housing
- The Cambridge housing market
- The Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust
- City-sponsored housing programs

There were questions from the study committee regarding how priorities for affordable housing in Cambridge are set, how condominium fees are handled, and the re-sale process for homes bought through the affordable housing programs.

The housing discussion will be continued at the next meeting.